

A report from your Legislature

State Representative **Mike Sells**

2005 SESSION REVIEW

Summer 2005

Dear Fellow Citizen:

We finished the 2005 Legislative Session, with about five hours to spare before the midnight, April 24 deadline!

The most publicized issue we tackled this year was the state budget. Certainly, the transportation package also received a lot of media attention. In addition to parts of those budget issues, my report covers legislation I've prime-sponsored and co-sponsored.

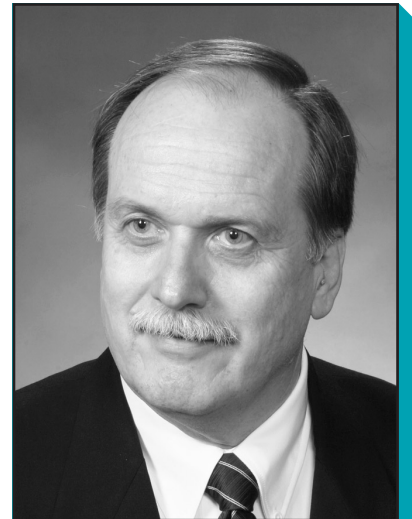
My priorities stayed the same throughout our 105-day session. Dependable jobs for our citizens, affordable health care for our families, and laudable schools for our children will always top my legislative agenda.

Please know that JoAnn Chapman, my legislative assistant, and I look forward to hearing from you. Your opinions help me do a better job representing our Snohomish County communities.

Sincerely,



Mike Sells
State Representative
38th Legislative District



Representative **Mike Sells**

Committee assignments:

- Higher Education, Vice Chair
- Transportation
- Housing

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◆ Jobs: It's time to improve support for training programs

A decent day's pay for a decent day's work. Deals don't come any fairer than that. And on-the-job instruction in an apprenticeship program is a great way for many citizens to learn skills for a dependable, good-paying job.

But like many things in life, there's been an obstinate bureaucracy in the administration of apprenticeship programs. I prime-sponsored a plan, which has now been signed into law, to prune a lot of the red tape.

The legislation allows a community or technical college to deduct tuition owed for apprentices directly from the amount of the training contract with an apprentice organization. This legislation slices current bureaucracy involved in moving checks back and forth between a college and an apprentice organization. My intent is that this money be managed more efficiently.

Apprenticeship programs are supervised by committees of labor and business groups. Most committees contract with a local community or technical college to provide instruction. Even if the contract calls for the college to pay the apprenticeship committee, the apprentice still owes tuition to the college.

The legislation eliminated an existing rule stopping a college from deducting tuition, which is owed on behalf of apprentices, from the training contract. Because of the old policy, both the college and the apprenticeship committee had to complete two financial transactions. **This extra layer of bureaucracy didn't make sense, and my legislation got rid of it.**

Apprentices in public works

Speaking of apprenticeship-training, we passed another measure bolstering programs in our building industry.

The new policy strengthens use of apprentices in public-works projects. Apprenticeship is the most effective tool for work-force training, but there haven't been enough programs for qualified citizens.

A skilled work force is fundamental for our economic vitality. Apprenticeship programs help keep a solid work force in the building trades. Our communities need more skilled workers, especially for projects financed by tax dollars. Using apprentices on these projects helps build a strong family-wage work force for the future.

The measure calls for apprentices to comprise at least 15 percent of the total labor hours on public projects that are esti-



mated to cost \$1 million or more. Large public projects such as the King County Justice Center and Qwest Field have successfully implemented these requirements.

Education is the great equalizer in our economy. Citizens who have solid education and training do their jobs better. They earn a better paycheck, too. Many skilled workers in our construction industry come from apprenticeship programs. These

programs require between 2,000 and 10,000 hours of on-the-job experience, as well as additional technical instruction.

◆ Health care: New policy seeks cheaper prescriptions for people with biggest needs

Doesn't it make sense to lend a helping hand to citizens who cannot afford the prescriptions they need? This year, we passed just such a policy. It's a measure aimed at bringing less-expensive prescriptions to more Washington people who need them.

The Health Care Authority can now establish a prescription-purchasing consortium in which private citizens, local governments, and other entities may participate. This consortium can include local governments, private organizations, labor groups, and people who either don't have insurance or don't have enough coverage for medicine they need.

A larger purchasing-pool will make medicine less expensive. There's strength in numbers, and prescription drugs are no different than other things. Ten people together usually get a better price than one person alone; a hundred people do better than 10; a thousand people do better than a hundred, and so on.

Right now, some state agencies are participating in this type of drug-purchasing program. A preferred-drug list, based on findings of an independent pharmacy and therapeutics committee, is set up. Negotiations are then held with drug companies.

State Representative Mike Sells

This program has resulted in discounted prescription prices for state-purchased health-care services. **The existing prescription-drug list has already resulted in \$15 million worth of savings for taxpayers. It's anticipated that another \$56 million will be saved in the next two years.**

The idea in this new law is to open the program to other citizens and groups of citizens.

Here's a Web site where you can go to obtain additional information and background for this legislation and other measures that we considered this year in Olympia: <http://www.leg.wa.gov/wsladm/billinfo1/bills.cfm>.

◆ Schools: Education at every level should always be one of our biggest priorities

I've heard it said that how the schools are run today goes a long way toward telling how the world runs tomorrow. That makes sense to me.



The new operating budget fully funds modest teacher-raises and class-size reductions. It also expands the Learning Assistance Program, provides more funding for special education, and emphasizes student-help to meet strict new graduation requirements. We fortified the School Improvement Program, and we invested an historic level of funding in much-needed school-construction.

Colleges and universities

I was honored with selection as Vice Chair of the House Higher Education Committee. Among other directions, we work on maintaining high-quality training programs. Without a doubt, improving our colleges and universities is a huge responsibility. **We'd better support the stronger opportunities high-quality training programs bring to Snohomish County.**

Good jobs will come if citizens have a chance for education they need to land those jobs in the first place. I'm working to increase college-access in Snohomish County. I want four-year

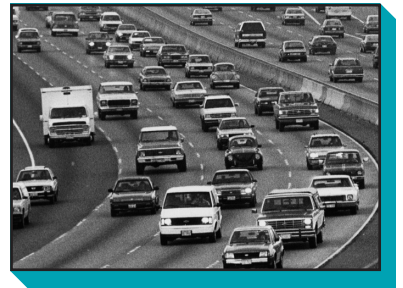
programs here, as well as more partnerships between our community colleges and our four-year schools.

The new budget provides a great many new college enrollments in other parts of our state. **But next session, I'll keep working to win support for a new four-year college in the northern part of our county.**

◆ Transportation: We must reinforce the vital parts of the infrastructure

Thousands more people every year are calling the Evergreen State their home. So thousands more people are out on our roads, streets, highways, and bridges. To put it mildly, our system is bursting at the shoulders.

Yes, the new transportation package includes a hike in the gas tax. It will cost the average driver between four and five dollars a month the first year. Safety and mobility projects will be paid for by this additional revenue. Here are some of the most significant Snohomish County projects:



- Snohomish Riverfront rail redevelopment.
- Interstate 5 / 41st Street interchange improvement.
- Interstate 5 / 116th Street interchange design.
- State Route 529 / Ebey Slough bridge replacement.
- State Routes 11, 169, 410, 520, 525, and 900 roadside-safety improvement.
- East Marine View Drive widening.
- East Everett Avenue crossing.
- 41st Street / Riverfront Parkway (phase 2).
- Bridges seismic retrofit.

What if we ignore the need for these types of infrastructure improvements? We will find ourselves driving and riding on increasingly crowded, frustrating, and unsafe roads.

The economic consequences are also a big concern because swift and efficient movement of cargo is essential. Our ports currently enjoy an advantage over California rivals because we're a day or so closer to Asian ports. But business leaders report that the Washington edge is slipping because our roads are so congested.

◆ Furthermore: Other matters came before us in this year's Legislature

- **Power rates.** I helped win support for a measure calling on Congress to reject the president's plan to raise Bonneville Power Administration rates charged to residential and business customers.

Northwest ratepayers would face a \$1.3-billion jolt in lost personal income if the president convinces Congress to accept his rate hike. We'd be looking at a loss of 13,000 jobs!

Snohomish County businesses such as Boeing, Kimberly-Clark, and other companies have relied for decades on relatively inexpensive electricity. **They provide good, family-wage jobs for thousands of our citizens.**

If the president's hike goes through, we'd face a 39-percent increase in power rates for consumer-owned utilities such as our own Snohomish County PUD.

- **Unemployment equity.** We passed a bill to right the unintended wrongs now hitting construction workers because of changes made in unemployment-insurance law a couple years ago. The unemployment-insurance system wasn't fair for many citizens who are literally building our state. **We need these adjustments so construction workers and other workers are treated fairly.**

This legislation is about helping people hurt by the old law, and now in danger of falling into poverty. It's about families. Construction work goes on year-round, and it's affected by economic cycles and weather. It isn't a seasonal industry. A lot of men and women in the industry rely to a big extent on unemployment benefits during periods between their jobs.

